

Secretary of the Navy

“Fox & Friends” Interview with Acting Secretary Thomas B. Modly

**Speaker:
Thomas B. Modly,
Acting Secretary of the Navy**

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Q: Well, help is on the way. Watch as hospital ship USNS Mercy pulls into port in Los Angeles. It moved to the city from San Diego amid surging coronavirus cases there. Nearly 900 medical workers are onboard. They will treat patients who are not diagnosed with the coronavirus, helping ease the demand on local hospitals. A thousand hospital beds are on the ship.

Q: Wow. Its sister ship, the Comfort, preparing to deploy to New York City today to help ease the burden on city hospitals.

Q: President Trump will soon head to Norfolk, Virginia, along with our next guest, to watch the state-of-the-art vessel set sail.

Q: Here with more is Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly. Thomas, Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being here. We appreciate it. Tell us the overview of the efforts the Navy is making here.

ACTING SECRETARY THOMAS B. MODLY: Well, as you know, these two hospital ships are very unique ships. We keep them largely to work with our forces in the case of a major wartime scenario, but over the past several years they've been used all over the world to assist individuals in disaster situations, and they've become sort of the symbol of the United States, our compassion, and also our capability to respond quickly to crises. This will really be the first time that they've been used in the United States.

I asked the question back in February whether or not they could be used to assist in this crisis, and they've thought very creatively about how we could get these ships ready on time, and they're on their way. So it's very exciting for us.

Q: You know, Thomas, if you look at the USNS Comfort, for example, and some of the features – a thousand patient beds, 80 intensive-care beds, 12 operating rooms, one isolation ward, up to 1,200 personnel – it's really incredible. I'm in awe of how quickly this was able to be mobilized. So can you just talk a little bit about what the procedure was in terms of when you got notified – when someone would get notified to sort of get this ship ready, how quickly it can happen, and what the protocol is like internally? Is there order? Is it chaos? What would people who are on the outside get some insight into what's going on in the inside?

SEC. MODLY: Well, it is – it's remarkable, and we certainly appreciate all the accolades we've been getting about getting these ships together. But frankly, this is what we do in the United States. Navy. And so I'm, obviously, very proud of the efforts that were taking place here.

And initially we thought, you know, how could we actually use these ships; they're not really designed to help with infectious disease, or we don't have the hospital crew that are assigned to them who are infectious-disease doctors or epidemiologists. So what we – as we worked through the process we thought, well, we could possibly help offload some of the demand that these hospitals are having, particularly in these heavy population areas like Los Angeles and New York. And it was just a matter of saying, OK, how can – how can we

accelerate some of the maintenance things, put some things off for a later time so that we can still get these ships up there on time to help with this crisis –

Q: Sure.

SEC. MODLY: – because every day matters. And so it's been – it's been great.

Q: Yeah. Secretary Modly, let me ask you, too, because I had the privilege in 2003 to go on the USS – USNS Comfort during the invasion of Iraq, and what we saw then was their ability to change and adapt to the mission. In this case you're providing not just a thousand hospital beds, but you're bringing in wartime-footing medical, changing/evolving tactics.

SEC. MODLY: Well, exactly. And this is something that I've told the force since I've been in this job, that we need to be very prepared for a future that's going to be unpredictable. I think that's the most predictable thing we can say about it. And I said that several years ago, before I knew anything about the coronavirus, but here we are. The nation needs us and the nation expects us to step up, and that's exactly what we're doing.

Q: Secretary Modly, what is your message to Americans who see ships arriving at big cities that they – that they revere and there's a lot of uncertainty? As the secretary of the Navy, what would you say to people?

SEC. MODLY: Well, I think that they should feel very confident that their Navy is doing what we expect their Navy to do. In addition to these two ships, I hope they also recognize that we have 90 other ships that are out there at sea performing operational missions to defend the country. And we do this every day, and there are young Americans on those ships, and they are incredible. I've met them all over the world. And I think – what I hope will happen out of this is that they'll get a sense of comfort, particularly in these areas that are sensing the crisis like New York and Los Angeles; that they'll see these ships and they'll get a sense of comfort that the nation is very prepared and able to respond in crises like this, and hopefully it'll calm some nerves.

And more importantly, I hope the ships are able to actually do their mission. And hopefully that will be something we'll be reading about, and I think the entire nation will be very proud of the crews on those ships.

Q: Absolutely.

Q: Secretary, I know, being in New York City, it's incredibly comforting to me to see this effort. And just – it's just I live in awe of members of the military like yourself who are able to mobilize things like that, and I just want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. For someone who lives in Manhattan, who sees this very close to home, I just – I'm very grateful for everything that you're doing, and I know everyone on the panel is and everyone in the city is as well, and in other cities as well.

SEC. MODLY: Well, I appreciate that. And I will tell you, it's our honor to be able to do this. This is what we've been asked to do. Every single sailor around the world who has an opportunity to see these ships know that they're a part of that same force, and they want to do everything they can to help the nation get through this crisis.

Q: Absolutely.

SEC. MODLY: That's what we're here for. So we appreciate it.

Q: Not to mention you're checking the Iranians and the Chinese and others around the globe as we deal with this as well.

Mr. Secretary, thank you so much.

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